

Senator Erik Poulsen

34th Legislative District

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Dear Neighbors:

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state senator. Representing you in Olympia has always been both challenging and rewarding — but never more so than this past legislative session.

When the session began in January, our state budget was engulfed in a perfect storm. The Sept. 11 attacks worsened our slumping economy. Trade, tourism, and retail sales declined suddenly. Boeing and the high-tech industry announced unprecedented layoffs.

Meanwhile, voter-approved initiatives decimated essential funding for education, health care, public safety, and myriad other state services. The result was a \$1.5 billion deficit, the largest in our state's history.

With razor-thin Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, we set out to finish the legislative session on time and on budget. I'm proud that we achieved that goal — but many of the decisions we faced were agonizing.

One of my greatest disappointments is that our hard-fought transportation solutions must wait until the November ballot for voter approval. I voted to begin the improvements right away, thereby lowering project costs to taxpayers and producing thousands of new construction jobs to help jumpstart our economy, but the powerful Speaker of the House demanded a referendum. I firmly believe that legislators are elected to make tough decisions — not to pass the buck.

Inside, you can see where I stood on some of the issues facing Washington. Your feedback, questions, and suggestions are very helpful to me. Let's keep in touch!

Respectfully,



Erik Poulsen



The budget

no general tax increase unprecedented cuts

As a lead negotiator for the budget-writing Ways & Means Committee, I faced the daunting task of solving a \$1.5 billion deficit without increasing the tax burden on individuals or businesses. My principles were as follows:

- Preserve the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens
- Protect funding for education, health care, public safety, and other essential services
- Eliminate inefficiencies and nonessential funding for travel and other such state agency expenses.

To accomplish this, the Legislature made deep, painful

cuts in virtually every area of state government.

We also used a portion of the “rainy day” reserves established by Initiative 601, closed several tax loopholes which gave a competitive advantage to out-of-state businesses, and will sell state bonds using a fraction of the tobacco settlement as security.

Most legislators, including myself, were uncomfortable with some of the decisions necessary to balance the budget. But our thoughtful deliberations resulted in extraordinary bi-partisan cooperation and a new sense of urgency to

reform the state’s outdated, unfair tax system.

Because our state relies so heavily on revenue from regressive sales taxes, we’re doomed to follow the boom-and-bust cycle of the economy more than other states. That’s a key reason why Washington’s recovery is expected to take longer than the rest of the nation. It’s imperative that state government develop a more stable source of funding and impose far greater scrutiny of tax exemptions and deferrals.

Transportation solutions head to voters

An overwhelming bipartisan majority vote in the Senate, as well as strong leadership from my 34th District teammates in the House, put us on the verge of passing a transportation relief package that would have immediately begun working to:

- Widen highways
- Replace bridges
- Build ferries
- Promote public transit
- Improve the safety of dangerous roadways such as the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

A dispute over whether to require a referendum on this package continued until the last few minutes of the legislative session. Facing the possibility of yet another costly and contentious overtime session, the Legislature agreed to let the voters have the final say in November.

The ballot measure calls for a 9-cent overall increase in the gas tax (spread over two years), a gross-weight fee increase of 30 percent for commercial trucks and a 1 percent vehicle sales-tax increase. Roughly \$7.7 billion would be generated for transportation priorities throughout the state.

Ferry System Improvements

- Four new auto ferries and two new passenger ferries would be constructed and operated.
- To mitigate losses from voter approval of Initiative 695, \$33 million would be used to operate the passenger-only ferry fleet.
- \$51 million would help upgrade the Kingston and Southworth passenger-only terminals, while \$273 million would be spent to preserve existing auto ferries and their terminals.

Key Votes at a Glance



Unfair Regional Transportation Plan Requires King County voters to foot the bill for improvements to Seattle's major highways that benefit the state as a whole. Major highways such as state Route 99, Interstates 5 and 90 benefit travelers and business people from all around the state, and these projects should be paid for by everyone.



Extend the Monorail Seattle taxpayers will vote on an extension of the monorail to West Seattle, financed through vehicle and property taxes. I found it ironic that some of the same lawmakers who complain most loudly about Olympia exerting control over local questions were trying to put a stop to our self-financed monorail. Thankfully, we were able to hold off their attack.



Allow Collective Bargaining Allows 70,000 state workers to negotiate with the governor on wages and benefits. The Legislature can vote to reject any of the agreements, which are limited to one fiscal biennium.



Support School Levies Would have eliminated the supermajority requirement for the passage of school levies. Elections of lawmakers require only a simple majority, as do tax cuts. School levies should be given an equal footing. The measure failed by a single vote in the House.



Overturn Animal Trapping Ban The Senate voted to overturn the voter-initiated ban on animal traps. The people of Washington expressed themselves clearly when they voted to ban animal trapping and poisoning. The House killed the measure.



Join the Big Game Lottery Washington will join a multistate lottery to raise an estimated \$24 million annually to finance education and other vital government services. Many Washingtonians travel to Idaho and Oregon to play multistate lotteries. The Big Game draws on a different night than those lotteries, so now Washington will also benefit from that cross-border traffic.



Tougher Seat Belt Laws Allows law-enforcement officers to stop motorists who fail to use their seat belts, a change that will save lives. While not wearing a seat belt has been an infraction for some time, it was enforced only when motorists broke another traffic rule as well.



Prohibit Insurance Credit Scoring Prohibits insurance companies from canceling or refusing to renew a personal insurance policy due to a consumer's credit history.



Extend Unemployment Benefits Unemployment tax reforms help laid-off Boeing workers by extending their benefits.



Treatment for Drug Offenders Penalties reduced for some nonviolent drug offenders, with savings in jail and prison costs directed to treatment and drug courts.



Stop Bullying in Schools Requires all school districts to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying of any student.



Expand Sick Leave Expands the law that requires employers to let workers use paid sick leave to take care of children younger than 18 years old. The list would be expanded to include children older than 18 with disabilities, spouses, parents, parents-in-law and grandparents.



Support Immigrant Health Care Makes 4,200 legal immigrants and 22,800 children of undocumented immigrants eligible to enroll in the state Basic Health Plan, a subsidized plan for low-income people.



Expand Death Penalty to Terrorism Would have created the crime of terrorism and allowed the death penalty for those convicted of killing through a terrorist act. Passed by the House and killed by the Senate.



Increase Wiretaps Would have allowed police to record telephone conversations and intercept e-mail without a court order if they suspect terrorist activities. Passed by the House and killed by the Senate.



Formulate Prescription Drug Plan Tackled the rising cost of prescription drugs in state health plans by mandating the most cost-effective medicines. Guaranteed doctors' ability to prescribe the best medication, reduced paperwork, maintained the quality of patient care, and saved the state millions of dollars. After intense lobbying by drug manufacturers, failed to become law.



Create Metropolitan Parks Districts Communities will be able to use property tax levies to develop, operate and maintain parks and recreation facilities if approved by local voters.



Ease Food Safety Rules Establishes statewide standards for food handling and preparation, but eliminates more strict county-imposed rules that help prevent food-borne diseases.

Mining Maury Island

Not Now, Not Ever!

This session I championed legislation that would have required the Department of Natural Resources to continue its protective Aquatic Reserve designation for Maury Island. Fierce lobbying resulted in the bill's demise. However, language was inserted in the state budget to help achieve the same result. I'll continue fighting to keep the Aquatic Reserve Program intact and protect our island from an environmental disaster!

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